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AUTHOR	Hansman, Catherine A.
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ABSTRACT

Informal mentoring is dependent on the relationship developed between mentor and protege, but job needs and task designs within organizations may also define and construct them. The intent is to foster organizational goals and help new employees become acclimated to workplace culture while learning from experienced practitioners. How to choose mentors and proteges is problematic. Since informal mentoring has tended to exclude women, people of color, people of other social classes, and those of different sexual orientation, formal mentoring programs have sought to address exclusion by pairing proteges from historically marginalized groups with mentors who are mid- or high-level employees. Senior employees may be chosen to serve as mentors because they best represent corporate culture and dominant cultural values; proteges may also be chosen based on dominant organizational culture. Marginalized employees may never have the opportunity for formal mentoring. Formal mentoring may provide opportunities for previously marginalized groups to participate in mentoring relationships from which they learn and receive career help and psychosocial support, but they may encourage unquestioning replication of organizational values and hegemonic culture by a new generation of employees. Power issues arise as formal mentoring programs are planned, such as whose interests are primarily served, whether mentoring programs are set up to manage learning or empower learners, and who should decide the mentors and proteges to be included. (Contains 29 references.) (YLB)

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Catherine A. Hansman

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Who Plans? Who Participates? Critically Examining Mentoring Programs

Catherine A. Hansman
Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the literature concerning formal mentoring programs from a socialist feminist perspective that allows an examination of power issues and the intersection of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation within mentoring relationships.

Introduction

Many definitions of mentoring exist, but the concepts of helping others navigate unknown or unfamiliar cultures are reflected in many interpretations of mentoring in adult education literature. Caffarella (1993) defines mentoring relationships as "intense caring relationships in which persons with more experience work with less experienced persons to promote both professional and personal development" (1992, p. 28). Daloz (1986) proposes that mentors may act as "interpreters of the environment" (p. 207) to help learners navigate unfamiliar contexts. Mentoring relationships, informal and formal, are viewed as integral to learning in the workplace, for career help, and for developmental and psychosocial support.

Cafarella's and Daloz's definitions of mentoring reflect the ideas that are common in *informal mentoring*, where mentors and protégés come together through mutual interests and attraction. Informal mentoring associations, which may last for many years, are dependent on the relationship developed between the mentor and protégé. The availability of mentoring relationships has been linked to faster career advancement (Dansky, 1996; Scandura, 1992) and to better wages. Nevertheless, as research and common sense informs us, potential drawbacks of informal mentoring relationships are the unavailability of mentors to women and persons of color. If the majority of experienced persons in organizations are white men, or are members of a different social class than potential protégés, they may be unwilling to mentor those who are perceived to be different for whatever reasons (Stalker, 1994). Early research concerning mentoring assumes that the gender, class, or ethnic group of either the mentors or protégés does not impact how the relationships are formed or the quality of the interactions between mentors-protégés (Merriam, 1983; Stalker, 1994). As a result, affirmative action laws and workplace initiatives to help women, persons of color, and those of different social classes have led organizations and institutions to develop formal mentoring programs to address historically marginalized groups and foster workplace learning. But formal mentoring programs in the workplace do not just address individual human needs. Since "individual learning is central to organizational learning" (Marsick & Neaman, 1996), formal mentoring programs "contribute, through improved performance, to the bottom line" (Dirkx, 1996). In other words, formal mentoring programs may reflect the power and interests inherent within organizations. Within organizations and in formal mentoring programs, supporting learning among employees may cause increased performance as a by-product, however, it would seem that the interests of organizations are being served at the cost of employee or human interests (Bierema, 2000).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the literature concerning formal mentoring programs in various literature bases (adult education, human resource development, business publications) from a socialist feminist perspective (Tisdell, 1995). This perspective allows the examination of mentoring relationships and their intersection with gender, race, class, and sexual

orientation, as well as power relationships that may structure mentoring programs. The following questions will guide this examination of the literature: What problems inherent in informal mentoring relationships encourage the establishment of formal mentoring programs? Should formal mentoring programs enhance organizational learning or promote individual growth and development? Who is excluded or rendered invisible in formal mentoring programs, and can mentoring programs challenge unequal power relationships and institutional structures or simply reinforce those structures already in place? Finally, whose interests in relation to power and knowledge, are primarily being served by mentoring relationships?

The Literature Of Mentoring

Ideas of mentoring frequently encompass the notions of intense interpersonal relationships between senior and less experienced colleagues. Informal mentoring relationships are dependent on these relationships developed between mentor and protégé, but job needs and task designs within organizations may also define and construct them. Yet participating in informal mentoring relationships may be problematic if potential protégés do not "fit" into corporate culture. If the majority of experienced persons in organizations are members of the dominate culture within an organization (dominate because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation), they may be unwilling to mentor potential proteges that they perceive to be "other" (Stalker, 1994). Research studies bear this out and show that mentoring is not beneficial for all protégés, particularly those marginalized because of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation (Hansman, 1997, 1998, 2000; Hansman & Garafolo, 1995; Hale, 1995; Hite, 1998; Noe, 1988; Stalker, 1994). Since the nature of informal mentoring has tended to exclude women, people of color, people of other social classes, and those of different sexual orientation, formal mentoring programs, many times planned and operated from within human resource development (HRD) departments within organizations, have sought to address this exclusion by pairing proteges from historically marginalized groups with mentors who are mid or high level employees.

Formal Mentoring Programs

The intention of formal mentoring programs designed by human resource development departments in organizations in most cases is to foster organizational goals, help new employees become acclimated to the workplace culture while learning from experienced practitioners in those settings. Hildebrand (1998) lists the following reasons why organizations sponsor mentoring programs: increase trust among employees of management; preserve corporate culture; promote sharing information among employees; create future leaders; reduce employee turnover, fulfill diversity goals, build skills within the workforce, and to ensure that the work culture is replicated by newer employees (Carruthers, 1993). Finally, formal mentoring programs are designed to and may help those who, because of gender, race, class, or sexual orientation, may have limited opportunities for advancement break through the glass ceiling.

Formal mentoring programs in which mentors are assigned protégés can be likened to arranged or planned marriages. Cohen's (1995) describes formal mentoring as "the one-to-one relationship that evolved through reasonably distinct phases between the mentor and the adult learner" (p. 2). A prescriptive series of hierarchical steps are usually recommended for mentors and protégés to follow while building their relationships for organizations to build programs. Cohen's steps include: early phase, in which foundations of trust are established; middle phase, where mentors help protégés establish goals; later phase, where mentors interact with protégés

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to explore their interests, beliefs, and reasons for decisions; and final phase, where mentors function as models, challenging protégés to reflect upon their goals while pursuing challenges.

Newby & Corner (1997) stress learning within the mentor/protégé relationship, and that the main idea underlying formal mentoring programs is to help individuals grow, learn, and overcome obstacles. Their prescription for establishing mentoring programs includes the following steps: 1) determine the readiness of the organization and establish the goals for the mentoring program; 2) establish selection criteria for mentors and protégés 3) train mentors and novices for success 4) match the mentors and protégés 5) support mentor/protégé relationships; and 6) develop continuous improvement evaluations. Much like "classical" program planning, described by Cervero and Wilson (1994) as consisting of a series of prescriptive steps, the implication of the steps in formal mentoring programs is that if they are only followed as prescribed, good mentoring programs will happen, resulting in successful and helpful mentoring relationships.

There are downsides to formal mentoring. Arranged mentoring relationships, just like all relationships or marriages, can be unsuccessful and fail. Mentors and proteges might not share enough common interests to form and maintain a successful relationship. What is particularly problematic, however, is the way both mentors and proteges may be chosen by organizations. Senior employees who are asked to serve as mentors to protégés may be chosen because they best represent corporate culture and dominate cultural values And proteges may also be chosen based on dominant culture within the organization – employees who are marginalized because of race, gender, class, or sexual orientation may never have the opportunity to be formally mentored.

In addition to the above concerns are ones about "bosses" who serve as mentors to protégés. Within some mentoring programs, supervisors may be appointed as mentors to the people they supervise. Chao, Walz & Gardner (1992) and others have found that protégés whose mentors are their bosses have more comfortable relationships and communicate better than those protégés whose mentors are more distantly related to them in the chain of organizational command. Ragins and McFarlin (1990) explain this by suggesting that if mentors are bosses, protégés who are their subordinates have greater access to the mentor. In addition, bosses who serve as mentors know their protégés well, know the work environment and needs of their protégés, and are required by the organization to support their protégés. However, none of this research addresses the power dynamics of "bosses" mentoring their employees, and how these dynamics may influence the type of learning "allowed" for the protégé. Zey's (1985) research suggests that mentoring programs are most effective when partners are allowed to choose each other freely. But allowing free choice may also mean exclusion of those who are "other" as protégés (Stalker, 1994) by those in charge of these programs, thus reflecting the power of hegemonic culture within organizations.

Power in Mentoring Programs

Formalized mentoring programs may provide many opportunities for previously marginalized groups, such as women and minorities, to participate in mentoring relationships from which they ultimately learn and receive career help and psychosocial support. But as beneficial as formal mentoring programs may be for marginalized employees, they may also encourage the unquestioning replication of organizational values and hegemonic culture by a new generation of employees. Shied, Carter, and Howell (2001) charge that HRD professionals seldom analyze or even acknowledge the existence and consequences of power within the programs they plan. If we examine the research and literature surrounding formal mentoring

programs, it becomes clear that an in-depth examination of the power relationships that exist between mentor and protégé within these mentoring relationships is missing. Also missing is analysis of how these power relationships may affect learning within mentoring relationships and how mentoring programs may encourage the continual replication of hegemonic culture within organizations. If formal mentoring programs are viewed from this perspective, then questions concerning whose needs are being met by these programs (i.e. the organization or the protégé?) surface. Another concern is the power differential in mentoring relationships between mentors, protégés, and organizational interests. For instance, even though immediate supervisors may know more about their protégés than mentors who are more distantly placed within an organization, they also have power by virtue of their position as supervisors. The power differential between mentors who are supervisors and protégés may not transcend well in organizational politics or culture, coming into play in performance evaluations and other areas of the protégé's organizational life. In addition, mentors and protégés who are close in hierarchical levels within organizational structure may end up competing for the same jobs, which also can result in unequal and uncomfortable power dimensions within the mentoring relationship between mentor and protégé.

Although formal mentoring programs in organizations were established around notions that they would address those historically excluded from informal mentoring relationships because of the intersection of gender, race, class, or sexual orientation, questions still remain about these programs. For instance, should formal mentoring programs exist solely for the good of organizations? Whose interests are being served within formal mentoring programs? Who should have the power to decide who is "privileged" enough to become protégés and mentors? And who may be still marginalized and not included in these programs? As Schied, Carter, and Howell (2001) declare, power can be used to suppress issues and prevent or delay them from coming up for decision making, while at the same time constrain any questioning of prevailing or hegemonic practices within organizations. This may be true for formal mentoring programs as well.

Conclusion

Discussions of mentoring and mentoring programs have become increasingly common in adult education and human resource development literature. Developing formal mentoring programs may seem like a simple process of following Cohen's (1995) or others' mentoring plans or program planning models and prescriptions for mentoring. However, formal mentoring programs vary widely and reflect the power and interests of those involved in organizational life.

Power affects organizational life, and in addition, it should be an ethical concern for those in position to plan programs within organizations that result in change. Just as Schied, Carter, and Howell (2001) assert that human resource development as a neutral process must be questioned, so too should mentoring programs be challenged as neutral processes. Key questions should be addressed within organizations, such as: Can mentoring programs challenge unequal power relationships and institutional structures or simply reinforce them? Whose interests are primarily being served through mentoring programs, the organization's, the mentors' or the protégés? How do those who were historically excluded from positions of power within an organization because of gender, race, class, or sexual orientation contribute to and re-create organizational cultures and mentoring programs that do not replicate hegemonic cultures of the past? These questions are significant to adult educators and the field of human resource development and should guide future formal mentoring program planning. Bierema (2001) argues for adult educators and HRD professionals to work more closely together, that the

potential to complement each other through working together through research, theory & practice, thus joining the two fields in addressing social injustices. Perhaps common ground can be found through working together to plan formal mentoring programs

This review of the literature is significant to the field of adult education because it raises essential issues that should concern adult educators and human resource professionals as they plan formal mentoring programs. Apple (1990) claims that unequal positions of power structure the larger systems in society. As in society, unequal positions of power may be reflected in formal mentoring and make it difficult, if not impossible to deal with issues surrounding whose interests are primarily served. However, the harsh reality of bottom lines and corporate profits may make it difficult to achieve the ideal world of shared power and interests in formal mentoring programs, particularly if, as Bierema (2000) states, performance-driven HRD aligns with corporate rather than human interests, resulting in mentoring programs that emphasize and reproduce power structures as they control learning within these programs.

Are mentoring programs set up to manage learning or empower learners? Is it possible to serve learners and learning communities through mentoring programs within organizations while responding to HRD's "infatuation" with performance improvement? It may seem like a difficult, if not impossible, task to achieve in the context of formal mentoring programs. However, planning formal mentoring programs should be more than following a series of prescriptive steps. Furthermore, mentors in formal mentoring programs, and the adult educators who help plan these programs, can plan responsibly and act ethically while enhancing the personal, workplace, and professional development of all involved. As Cervero & Wilson (2000) maintain, the question of "who should benefit" (p. 13) is central to planning, managing, and participating in formal mentoring programs.

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